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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2005/1.



Statement

The Beijing Platform for Action is a landmark document that spells out the agenda for women's empowerment. It is aimed at removing all the obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making. It draws attention to the different issues and concerns that women around the world confront and presents strategies on how to address these issues and concerns. Women media activists from different parts of the world consider it especially significant, as it is the first official UN document that recognized media as a critical area of concern. It recognized women and media issues as one area of particular urgency that stands out as a priority for action.

During the past decade, we have seen a number of advances in women's access to and participation in media. In some parts of the world, there have also been improvements in the way women are covered and portrayed in the media. Advances in media technology have also facilitated a global communications network that transcends national boundaries and has an impact on public policy, and audience attitudes and behavior.

Evidently, the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women.

However, while more women are involved in careers in the media industry, few have attained positions at the decision-making level or serve on governing boards and bodies that influence media policy. The lack of gender sensitivity in the media persists as illustrated by the failure to eliminate the gender-based stereotyping that can be found in public and private local, national and international media organizations.

The continued projection of negative and demeaning women's images in different types of media - electronic, print, visual and audio must be changed. Print and electronic media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contributions to national and social development. Moreover, violent and pornographic media products are also negatively affecting women and their participation in society. Programming that reinforces women's traditional roles can be equally limiting. The worldwide trend towards consumerism has created a climate in which advertisements and commercial messages often portray women primarily as consumers and target girls and women of all ages inappropriately.

What we need is the kind of media that would provide women the greatest access and encourage their widest participation. What is crucial is media that would enhance women's participation and contribution to the promotion of social justice. Community media, with its participative structures and processes, has a potential to ensure women's access to and participation in the media. Since it is not driven by profit and is managed by people in the community, it is not governed by the same set of rules and standards that mainstream media observe in employing women. In community media, the value base is guided by principles of participation and community building, thereby providing opportunities to women at the community level, who fall outside the parameters set by mainstream media organizations. Essentially, community radio provides that crucial balance to the powerful media conglomerates that operate on the principle that there is less profit in media productions that promote and protect the interests of the people.

At the Asia-Pacific High Level Meeting to Review the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action held in Bangkok from 7 to 10 September 2004, the importance of community and independent media efforts in advancing women's status was underscored. The Bangkok Communiqué, the official document signed by 44 states members and associate members of the UN Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific, stated

that "Supporting and recognizing community and independent media to counter the negative and stereotypical portrayal of women and girls" is one of the challenges that the region needs to address.

We call on the delegates of the 49th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women to follow through on this recommendation coming from the Asia-Pacific region. In the last decade, we have seen an enormous growth in the community and independent media sector. Thousands of community radio stations have been established in different parts of the world –particularly in the South. Independent media groups continue to be established everywhere. We urge the delegates to support community and independent media that women's organizations from across the world use to put forward their agenda and promote their advancement.
